

## **2013 FEDERAL EMPLOYEE OF THE YEAR AWARD WINNER**

### **Category 2 - Outstanding Supervisory Employee**

## **Jack Giessner**

**Nuclear Regulatory Commission**

#### **FACTOR I - JOB COMPETENCE:**

Mr. Giessner is a consummate professional and leader at the Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC). The Agency's mission is to regulate the nation's civilian use of nuclear materials to ensure protection of public health and safety, promote common defense and protect the environment. Mr. Giessner's position in the agency is as a branch chief responsible for ensuring safe operation of several power reactor plants in the Midwest region of the country. He supervises federal inspectors and specialty engineers in the inspections at these plants. He ensures the plants perform in accordance with the rules, and performs continuous assessments to provide a high level of confidence the plants are operating safely. Although the NRC does not actually operate a plant, the Agency has the authority to take action against the site (called the licensee). If degradation in safety exists at the plants, he provides recommendations for Agency actions to require performance improvements at the plants. Finally, he ensures his team is ready to respond to any emergency at the site. To that end, Mr. Giessner and his team directly assists the Agency in achieving that mission.

An example of technical knowledge and leadership was evident during an event at one of the reactor plants caused by an electrical transient. With limited information, Mr. Giessner realized the potential complexity of the loss of electrical power to certain power control and indication systems. He immediately discussed the issue with his senior site inspector and dispatched him to the site. Mr. Giessner discussed the issue with regional executives. The event didn't fit into any of the pre-determined emergency classifications, but Mr. Giessner recognized through his phenomenal expertise that the issue would be challenging. Mr. Giessner established communications with the inspectors on site, executives from the site and regional executives. Mr. Giessner's team ensured the reactor was safely shutdown. The next day, Mr. Giessner recommended dispatching a special team to inspect the issue. The Region's executives approved his recommendations and charter to the team. Through his exemplary leadership, the team found several significant issues which needed to be corrected. Mr. Giessner and his team noted a weakness in the site's culture, and used creative methods to capture these insights, so they could be shared with the plant and the public. This included personal meetings with site executives, small group debriefs with plant personnel, and finally a public meeting to share our knowledge with the community. These actions helped establish a trust-but-verify relationship with plant management. This served, also, to motivate the site to take immediate corrective actions to improve plant safety. Mr. Giessner received a monetary performance award for his outstanding leadership in preparing for the public meeting.

#### **FACTOR II - IMPACT**

Mr. Giessner creates enthusiasm and his driving determination is contagious. He engages freely with his teammates, peers in his Agency, other federal partners and the communities near the reactor plants. His rapport stimulates an open, collaborative environment: a key value of the NRC. Specifically, in October of last year, Mr. Giessner's staffs provided insight about a low level alarm on a system connected to Lake Michigan. Through Mr. Giessner's leadership, his staff researched and noted Lake Michigan water level approaching record low levels. Mr. Giessner contacted Agency experts in the headquarters offices and formed an ad hoc team to evaluate the issue. Since there are critical systems connected to Lake Michigan, it was crucial to have an understanding on what was occurring, before record low levels were reached. Through his superb leadership, the team reached out to experts in the National Oceanic and



Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) and the US Army Corps of Engineers (USACE). Through follow-up calls, the Agency ensured there were no immediate concerns.

Mr. Giessner ensured the issue was not dropped and established a more formal team to look at the issue strategically – what could be the long-term impact. Mr. Giessner visited the other federal partners to build rapport and alignment on key mutual concerns with changing lake levels. Information sharing continues with outreach to the Canadian nuclear regulatory agency. Information sharing includes using the internet and webinar. The team is active today, and is motivated to ensure the NRC mission continues to be met during changes to environmental or climate conditions.

### **FACTOR III - SPECIAL EFFORTS:**

Mr. Giessner gives his all to ensure the NRC mission is met. Mr. Giessner was the key leader when performance problems arose at a reactor plant site in 2012. He had a dual approach to address the issue: provide outreach to the surrounding community to inform and educate them; and provide additional inspections needed to ensure there was assurance of plant safety. He chartered a team to implement the strategy, and motivated the team in this arduous task. The task required significant additional work, including outreaching to communities on weekends, nights and off-hours. In addition, honest discussions with site executives were held on issues and these were documented publicly, raising the level of transparency. Other key comprehensive outreach actions included additional press releases; outreaches to private citizens; detailed briefings to local, county, and state governments; and formal /informal briefing to the executive staffs for several congressmen. He devoted extensive time to ensure the team was pursuing creative ways to educate and inform the public regardless of the time of day, or day of the week. Mr. Giessner always ensured the right information was presented in a clear, transparent way. A unique approach to this outreach was developed in a webinar series. The regional office had never done webinars to reach out to the public, but Mr. Giessner wanted a way to provide information real time, efficiently (webinars are done at the region's office saving travel expenses for the government and the public), and which allows effective public questions. Mr. Giessner's team was comprised of technical experts, information technology experts and public affairs professionals. Mr. Giessner's eloquent public speaking capability serves him well as emcee for the events. His expert knowledge allows him to answer questions from the public rapid fire. Over one hundred people attended a recent webinar and over twenty questions were answered. The word is getting out, and the model is being offered to other offices. Webinars have been offered during off normal business hours and on weekends to fill the need to reach out to the community. The Webinar process has a customer feedback loop, and we are receiving increasingly positive comments on our efforts.

With all the outreach provided by Mr. Giessner's team, he never wavered from ensuring the core mission of protecting the public stayed the top priority. He spent countless hours ensuring the evaluations and assessments performed by his staff were accurate and focused. He coached team members if actions did not align with key objectives. When he established the formal inspection team to review all the issues over the past year at the reactor plant site, he ensured the team was objective and diverse. He provided all the resources to perform a successful inspection and let them succeed. The inspection concluded the site had made improvements over the last year.